



Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence

Member Organizations

**The Umbrella Center for
Domestic Violence Services**
Ansonia, CT

The Center for Family Justice
Bridgeport, CT

**The Center for Empowerment
and Education**
Danbury, CT

**Domestic Violence Program
United Services**
Dayville, CT

**Network Against Domestic
Abuse**
Enfield, CT

**Domestic Abuse Services
Greenwich YWCA**
Greenwich, CT

Interval House
Hartford, CT

**Chrysalis Domestic Violence
Services**
Meriden, CT

New Horizons
Middletown, CT

Prudence Crandall Center
New Britain, CT

**The Umbrella Center for
Domestic Violence Services**
New Haven, CT

Safe Futures
New London, CT

Domestic Violence Crisis Center
Norwalk, CT

Women's Support Services
Sharon, CT

Domestic Violence Crisis Center
Stamford, CT

Susan B. Anthony Project
Torrington, CT

Safe Haven
Waterbury, CT

**Domestic Violence Program
United Services**
Willimantic, CT

Testimony Regarding

HB 5037, An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023

Judicial Department Budget

Appropriations Committee February 16, 2022

Good evening Senators Osten, Winfield & Miner, Representatives Walker, Candelaria & Pavalock-D'Amato, and members of the committee. CT Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV) is the state's leading voice for victims of domestic violence and those who serve them. Our members provide essential services to nearly 40,000 victims of domestic violence each year. Services provided include 24-hour crisis response, emergency shelter, safety planning, counseling, support groups and court advocacy. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today regarding the state budget and the challenges facing domestic violence survivors and their children throughout the state.

We thank Governor Lamont for his proposal to allocate **\$14,865,300 in FY23 from the Coronavirus State Fiscal Recovery Fund (CSFRF) to the Judicial Branch to offset anticipated reductions in federal Victims of Crime Act (VOCA) grants to victim service organizations** and urge your support. It is our understanding that this amount includes \$3,772,000 for CCADV and our 18 member organizations for FY23. The Governor's proposal is clear that the final amount of funding allocated will be contingent on the final amount of reduced federal funding to the state.

As you may know, VOCA is funded through the fines and fees generated by federal prosecution, largely of white collar crime. The VOCA Fund does not contain any taxpayer dollars. The previous federal administration relied more heavily on the use of deferred prosecution and unfortunately federal law directed fines and fees from that type of prosecution to the General Treasury as opposed to the VOCA Fund. The federal VOCA Fix Act was signed into law this past summer ensuring that, moving forward, all fines and fees from deferred prosecution will be deposited into VOCA. However, due to several years of reduced deposits prior to the fix, the VOCA Fund has largely been drawn down resulting in an anticipated 50% reduction in victim assistance grants for the next two fiscal years to all states, including Connecticut, until the Fund can be replenished.

VOCA is a substantial funding source for CCADV and our 18 member organizations. A 50% reduction in funding would devastate our services system. VOCA funds 127 direct service domestic violence advocates across the state, including:

- **Criminal and Civil Court Advocates** – These advocates work for our member organizations across the state and provide support, information and advocacy designed to enhance the safety of victims, including in criminal cases from the time of arraignment through adjudication of the case. The criminal and docket advocates are stationed in the court as part of the Family Violence Intervention Unit, administered by Court Support Services (CSSD) and assist CSSD and the State Attorney's Office in recognizing the choices and needs of victims pre and post arraignment. Civil court advocates provide services such as assistance and support with restraining orders, divorce, custody, child support, housing, immigration, benefits, special education, and employment.
- **Adult Advocates** – These advocates work for our member organizations across the state and are the first point of contact for new clients, connecting them to all available services within the organization that they need based on

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their situation. This also includes access to basic needs which involves advocating on the client's behalf with various government and community agencies. They provide one-to-one adult counseling and facilitate adult support groups, while working closely with the child advocate to ensure that services for the family are connected in a holistic manner.

- **Law Enforcement Advocates** – These advocates work for our member organizations across the state and serve as a liaison between the domestic violence organization and the local police departments within their catchment area. They support local law enforcement in their response to domestic violence and work to address any issues either with individual cases or the systemic response. They also assist in planning and protocol evaluation for the statewide Lethality Assessment Program.
- **Safe Connect Advocates (statewide domestic violence hotline)** – These advocates, along with a program director and three program managers, work for CCADV and provide crisis response, information, risk assessment and safety planning, counseling, referrals to CCADV's 18 member organizations for ongoing, local support, and connections to other community-based resources. VOCA is the sole source of funding for the statewide domestic violence hotline.

In any year, a 50% reduction to these key services would result in lost jobs and likely failure to meet the needs of thousands of survivors. But the timing of this federal funding reduction could not be worse. Throughout the pandemic we have seen an increase in the complexity of issues facing survivors because many aspects of an abusive relationship are compounded by the dynamics of a global pandemic that restrict options and access to various supports and services. Connecticut's domestic violence service system was stressed before the pandemic and we anticipate that these pressures will only grow as we emerge from it.

We know that the VOCA funding gap is not a problem that was created by this or any other state government. Connecticut's Governor and General Assembly have been a model for supporting a strong response to domestic violence and we thank you for your continued leadership. Providing temporary, one-time state funding to address this federal funding issue will help ensure that our domestic violence service system can meet the ongoing needs of survivors without interruption.

We understand that the budget adjustments before you are specific to fiscal year 2023. It is important to note that the federal government anticipates the federal VOCA funding reduction will be present for both fiscal years 2023 and 2024. **To the extent that CSFRF funds are available beyond FY23, we respectfully request that the Appropriations Committee allocate those funds to cover the VOCA funding gap for both FY23 and FY24. For CCADV and our 18 member organizations, that would mean a total of \$7,544,000 (\$3,772,000 in each of FY23 and FY24).**

I will quickly note that the Governor's budget also allocated \$2,900,000 in CSFRF funds in FY23 under "criminal justice" while directing that the funding come through the Department of Social Services (DSS). This funding is intended to assist with survivor-related needs that have been intensified by the pandemic, including sheltering, hoteling, food, transportation costs, basic needs, childcare assistance, housing, moving, utilities, and furniture assistance. We will speak more to these needs and this allocation during the hearing on the DSS budget.

Thank you for your consideration.

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